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C O N F I D E N T I A L ALGIERS 001911

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SUBJECT: POST LUGAR MISSION: ALGERIAN FM BEDJAOUI ON
WESTERN SAHARA

Classified By: Ambassador Richard W. Erdman,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) In an August 31 meeting on several topics with FM Bedjaoui, Ambassador reaffirmed President Bush's appreciation for Algeria's help in facilitating the release of the final 404 Moroccan prisoners previously held by the Polisario. Making reference to President Bush's letter to President Bouteflika sent shortly after the conclusion of Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Lugar's visit to the region, Ambassador reiterated our appreciation. Bedjaoui said Algeria appreciated the written message from the U.S. President and was further gratified by Morocco's gesture to grant agreement to Presidential Chief of Staff Belkheir as the next Ambassador to the Kingdom the same day the request was received. For its part, the GOA approved Morocco's recent request for agreement to its candidate with the same speed.

2. (C) The prisoner release by the Polisario and the quick agreement for Belkheir were positive gestures, affirmed Bedjaoui. More forward momentum was needed in economic and cultural exchanges. Leaving alone the question of the Western Sahara, both Algeria and Morocco needed to move forward. "Algeria is not the enemy of Morocco. I am not the enemy of Morocco," emphasized the FM. Bedjaoui noted that in 1975 the UNGA had asked the International Court in the Hague for an advisory opinion on legal issues regarding the Western Sahara. "I pleaded the case (for self-determination) as a diplomat. Did that make me an enemy of Morocco? No." For 30 years, Bedjaoui claimed, Morocco has made little to no effort to move toward the position of the international community on the Western Sahara issue despite having originally argued alongside Algeria for the right of self-determination, when Spain was still the colonial power.

3. (C) Algeria, continued Bedjaoui, respected the Moroccan psychology on Western Sahara and had thus shown great flexibility in agreeing to the Baker Plan despite the fact that it did not provide for a true exercise of self-determination for the Sahrawi people. Instead of limiting referendum voting rights strictly to the indigenous Sahrawis, the Baker Plan extended voting rights to over 110,000 Moroccans as well. With Algeria's strong encouragement, the Polisario had nonetheless accepted the participation of these Moroccans in a referendum.

4. (C) Ambassador reiterated U.S. hopes that both sides would be able to seize upon the POW release to build a more positive climate in the region. He noted that there was a serious problem of communication on both sides and that Belkheir's posting in Rabat hopefully would help reduce communication problems. Well-intentioned actions by one side or the other were not always properly understood because they had not been adequately explained or privately briefed in advance. Morocco's announcement lifting the visa requirement, for example, was not briefed in advance and thus caught the Algerians by surprise, prompting a negative rather than a positive reaction. The abrupt canceling of Prime Minister Ouyahia's visit by Morocco, which misread Algerian seriousness about using the visit to move toward a reopening of the border, had also caused problems.

5. (C) For its part, Ambassador continued, Algeria made a "serious mistake" in not responding in a more concrete and positive way to King Mohammed VI's significant gesture of visiting Algiers for the Arab League Summit. Publicly, the perception was that the King had made a major gesture but had gotten nothing in return. This in turn has affected the Moroccan mindset, strengthening those who argued against efforts to pursue rapprochement. If the situation was to improve, both sides would need to demonstrate greater sensitivity toward needs and concerns of the other. Bedjaoui responded that it was not too late to improve matters.

ERDMAN